Chapter One-alt intro story /super teen intro

mrs t chats with jason about
not wanting college -carlos
tries to persuay him -add on 20
pg use the washington high
book cover test

Three years before the fiasco The Last Normal Friday/pep rally

Jason wants to be a rapper after the really and rejects a great college offer and Mrs T. does not agree with the decision even takes his car keys---------The final bell at West Ridge High didn't ring. It screamed. echoed down the well built vintage halls of historically black highschool, the kids called the beast, slang nick name given to a big old stable structure going back to the days of civil rights leaders, thing had some renovations but mostly old dusty relics from the past .

The old speaker crackled with static before a loud metallic shriek echoed through every hallway.

"Eeeeeeeeee..."

Students froze.

Then the principal's voice returned, Dr. Cynthia Fulgore The rudest principle ever .

"...Sorry about that, ok so we have a surprise i think . Have a safe weekend." oh , wait dont forget about the pep ralley friday,its going to big zdogs, the schoolmascot.

we have special musical guess , rapper cash grill, and the plenty money boys will be here. The p.o.m.b will be here live for you alls enjoyment the test scores are are up I promised i would do something big for you all. Tell your mom and bring a friend," she said cheerfully, unlike her often strict personality.

The halls exploded into noise, excitement , loud and audacious.

"lame!" some body yelled in the back ground , while must buzzed with interest. " we dont care about p.o.m.b we want some money lady" another guy screamed.

Lockers slammed and people crowded the exit near the bus . Teens danced , twerked and others simply locked up their books and went home, the day was hot and zesty more so than natural. youthful funk filled the big yellow bus prompting some of black teens to open windows on hot summer day.

"cash grill is coming , ooh he is cute" one girl said putting her books in the locker." Tina thought everybody was cute, even the hustlers next to the jailhouse.

"cute if you into deep sea fish looking brothers , he is not not for me girl no " no way i like pretty men.

Sneakers squeaked across polished floors. nikes, pumas boots and sandals . Fade the most popular basketball player grabbed a peopl rally flyer off the old painted wall next to the trophy case and folded it up, he looked interested, and when fade was interested everybody was interested. Tina and the others started grabbing the flyers.

Everybody was laughing, yelling, recording TikToks, arguing over basketball, and trying to beat the buses.

Jason shrugged, grabbed his backpack, and followed his friend through the hallway.

Music leaked from somebody's headphones. “boom boom boom “ the melody faded as he passed by, a familiar site at this over croweded school some saw as a prison.

Girls practiced dance moves in front of trophy cases. stopped immediately, by lame hall monitors dedicated to a free job. Nerds who badly needed extra credit.

The football team crowded around the vending machine.

Everybody wanted to get home.

Everybody except Mr. Wilson.

The history teacher stood outside his classroom with his arms crossed.

"hey you come over here !"

Terrell sighed.

"Man...what now?"

"You still owe me two pages on Reconstruction of civil law "

"I reconstructed enough." he said laughing

"You reconstructed excuses." he had an equal since of humor many said he was the funniest teacher around

Jason laughed.

Mr. Wilson pointed.

"You laughing too."

"I ain't even in your class." you might be next year punk

"You guilty by association."

"That's illegal."

"It should be." they all laughed

Terrell leaned toward Jason.

"See? That's why I like him. He roast people professionally."

"You still failing."

"...Never mind."

They walked away laughing.

Outside, the September sun lit up the campus. It was like a cinematic movie only blacker.

Cars lined the student parking lot. Some new some rattled.

Basketballs bounced on the outdoor courts.

Fresh-cut grass mixed with the smell of cheap school pizza from the cafeteria vents.

West Ridge High looked ordinary.

Normal.

Safe.

At least it tried to.

A skinny freshman suddenly sprinted across the courtyard screaming. “im outta here as he sprinted to the bus that waited with a open door, and a driver who looked ready to go home.

In the lobby a motion was stirring while people gathered around fade.

"IT MOVED!"

Everybody looked. confused “what you talkin bout” one guy joked in the back ground

"What moved?" “your hairline?”

“not a joke the” "The statue!"

Students burst into laughter. “man you are high no wonder why you got kept back in your last grade”

"The zombie bulldog !"

"The mascot?"

"It blinked!"

A senior shook his head. “man fade been hit too many times on the football field.”

"Freshmen weird."

Another student yelled,

"You been eating cafeteria meat again?"

More laughter. not a care what was sade about the old bronze mascot the haunted the halls of the campus.

The frightened freshman pointed toward the bronze zombie statue in front of the school.

It stood perfectly still.

Exactly where it had always been.

Jason looked at it anyway.

"...You ever notice its eyes?" maybe an omen

Terrell rolled his own.

"Bro..."

"They look different."

"They literally made outta metal."

Jason shrugged.

"I know."

Still...

For just a split second...

He could've sworn the zdog wasn't looking toward the football field

anymore.

It looked at him.

Hot girl, Maya cc Johnson caught up with them.

She carried three books all the subjects she frequently failed at , headphones around her neck, and always looked like she knew something everybody else didn't.

She wasn't the loudest person.

She wasn't the quietest either.

She noticed things. She was hot it didnt matter how wrong she was when she spoke.

"You two waiting on the bus?" she said popping her lips and adding gloss. She loved Terrell didnt care much for jason he was creepy to her .

"Nah," Terrell said.

"My cousin picking me up."

Jason nodded.

"My mama working late."

Maya looked toward the statue.

"...Y'all hear what happened this morning?"

"What?"

"The janitor quit."

"They always quit." “what’s the big deal about some cooky janitor

quitting”

"No."

She lowered her voice.

"He said somebody was inside the gym before sunrise."

"So?"

"The cameras never showed anybody."

Jason smiled.

"You trying to scare us?"

"I ain't trying."

Terrell laughed.

"You watch too many horror movies."

Maya shrugged.

"Maybe."

"But?"

"He kept saying..."

She paused. staring into a hand hell mirror fixing her braids one by one .

"...he heard somebody humming."

Jason smirked.

"Humming?"

"Old church songs."

Terrell burst out laughing. “man im done”

"So...the ghost love gospel?"

"I'm serious."

Jason laughetoo.

"Ghost trying to get saved." “we about to be baptized” he said before laughing.

The three nearly fell over laughing.

Chapter Three – Dreams and Dead Ends

The smell of baked macaroni, fried chicken, and lemon furniture polish floated through the Solid four bed room home.

Mrs. Tanya—known to everybody on the block as Mrs. T—sat proudly at the kitchen table wearing her reading glasses. An expensive cream-colored envelope rested in front of her. she had just showered and felt great.

Jason leaned against the refrigerator pretending not to care.

“wassup ma what’s on the menu”

His older brother Carlos stood nearby stealing chicken wings off a plate. “chicken i can answer that” carlos added

Mrs. T smiled so wide her cheeks hurt. “my my my im impressed.”:

"You know," she said, clearing her throat dramatically, "I been waiting eighteen years to open one of these."

Jason laughed.

"Mama, just read it."

Carlos grabbed another wing. before pouring some lemonade into a large nba gulper cup.

"Read it before I eat everything. This chicken got a scholarship too."

Mrs. T pointed a finger. “stop playing you too silly”

"Carlos... if one more wing disappear, your scholarship gonna disappear."

Carlos slowly put the wing back.

"...I respect the process."

Jason chuckled.

Mrs. T carefully unfolded the letter.

"'Dear Mr. Jason Brooks. Congratulations...'"

She stopped.

Covered her mouth.

"Oh my Lord..."

Jason frowned.

"What?"

She looked at him with watery eyes.

"You got in!" “oh lord you got in!”

Jason blinked.

"What?"

"You got into Hampton University."

Carlos exploded.

"LET'S GO!"

He tackled Jason into a hug.

"My little brother smart!"

Jason laughed while trying to breathe.

"Man... get off me!"

Mrs. T stood up crying.

"Baby... first person in this family going to college."

She hugged Jason so hard his feet nearly left the floor.

"I knew God had something special for you."

Jason smiled awkwardly.

"...Thanks, Ma."

Mrs. T walked around the apartment like she'd just won the lottery.

"I'm calling Grandma."

"I'm calling Auntie Denise."

"I'm posting this."

Carlos laughed.

"Mama don't even know how Facebook work."

"I'll learn TODAY."

Everyone laughed.

For one perfect minute...

Everything felt right.

Then Jason scratched the back of his neck.

"...Mama."

Mrs. T looked over.

"What?"

"I gotta tell you something."

Carlos immediately recognized the voice.

It was Jason's "I'm about to ruin everybody's day" voice.

"Oh no..."

Mrs. T smiled.

"What is it?"

Jason looked down.

"I don't think I'm going."

Silence.

Carlos slowly stopped chewing.

Mrs. T stared.

"...Going where?"

"College."

The room froze.

Even the refrigerator seemed quieter.

Mrs. T laughed.

"Boy, quit playing."

"I'm serious."

Her smile disappeared.

"What do you mean serious?"

Jason inhaled.

"I wanna rap."

“what you mean wrap the invite in plastic”

Carlos closed his eyes.

"Oh Lord..."

Mrs. T blinked twice.

"...Rap?"

Jason nodded.

"I've been recording with Terrell."

"We got songs."

"We building a following."

"I think this is my shot."

Mrs. T stared at him another few seconds.

Then folded the acceptance letter...

Very...

Very slowly. Anger and rage was obvious.

"So..."

She said calmly.

"You telling me..."

Jason swallowed.

"You throwing away a full scholarship..."

"...to become Lil' Whoever?" “dont do this, you know how i feel about those little hustler type guys.

Carlos covered his face.

"Jason..."

Jason raised both hands.

"It ain't like that."

"We actually good."

"Our videos getting views."

Mrs. T folded the letter again.

"So that's the plan?"

Jason nodded.

"I think God gave me music."

“god gave you a brain use it”

Mrs. T looked toward the ceiling.

"Lord..."

She whispered.

"I asked for patience."

Carlos quietly slid his plate farther away.

He knew what was coming.

Mrs. T suddenly exploded.

"BOY HAVE YOU LOST YOUR EVERLASTING MIND?"

Jason jumped.

"Mama—"

"I worked TWO JOBS!"

"I missed birthdays!"

"I wore shoes with holes in them!"

"So you could have choices!"

Jason spoke softly.

"I appreciate that."

"You appreciate it by saying NO?"

"I just don't wanna spend four years studying something I don't love."

Mrs. T pointed toward the acceptance letter.

"You know how many kids prayed for this?"

Jason looked away.

"I know."

"No you don't."

Carlos finally stepped in.

"Mama..."

She spun around.

"Don't 'Mama' me!"

Carlos slowly backed up.

"...Never mind."

Jason sighed.

"I wanna build something."

Mrs. T crossed her arms.

"So you gonna be rich next week?"

"No."

"Next month?"

"No."

"So who's paying car insurance?"

Jason stayed quiet.

Mrs. T reached into her purse.

"Give me those keys."

Jason frowned.

"What?"

"The car."

Jason looked confused.

"Mama..."

"The keys."

Silence.

He slowly reached into his pocket.

His fingers tightened around them.

Mrs. T extended her hand.

"The keys."

Jason reluctantly dropped them into her palm.

The jingle echoed through the apartment.

Mrs. T slipped them into her purse.

"You wanna chase rap dreams?"

"You can catch the city bus."

Carlos tried not to laugh.

Jason shot him a look.

"Dude..."

Carlos shrugged.

"I ain't laughing..."

A tiny snort escaped.

Mrs. T glared.

"Carlos."

His smile disappeared.

"Yes ma'am."

"You think this funny?"

"No ma'am."

Jason grabbed his hoodie.

"I'm going outside."

Mrs. T sat back down.

"You'll thank me one day."

Jason opened the door.

"Maybe."

The apartment door slammed.

Hard.

An hour later...

The neighborhood basketball court echoed with bouncing basketballs and squeaking sneakers.

Carlos sank an easy three-pointer.

Swish.

Jason caught the rebound without saying anything.

Carlos dribbled beside him.

"You really doing this?"

Jason nodded.

"Yeah."

Carlos sighed.

"You know Mama ain't mad because of rap."

"I know."

"She scared."

Jason spun the basketball on one finger.

"I don't wanna live somebody else's dream."

Carlos nodded.

"I get it."

"But dreams don't pay rent right away."

Jason smiled.

"You sounding old."

"I'm twenty-four."

"You thirty in big-brother years."

Both laughed.

Carlos bounced the ball back.

"Listen..."

"If you really serious..."

"Do music."

"But don't throw college away."

"You can do both."

Jason shrugged.

"I don't know."

Carlos looked toward the woods beyond the school fence.

The afternoon sun disappeared behind strange gray clouds.

For just a second...

He thought he saw someone standing perfectly still between the trees.

A tall man.

Long black coat.

Wide-brim hat. strange but all fast.

Watching them.

Carlos blinked.

The figure was gone.

Jason noticed.

"What?"

Carlos forced a smile.

"Nothing."

But somewhere beyond the basketball court...

Something smiled back.

The hip hop museum

The alley smelled of old rain and something metallic. Jason clutched the five-dollar bill, the worn edges soft against his thumb. This was it. The Rap Museum. Downtown. A place his mom, Mrs. T, would never step foot in. She called it a den of iniquity, a distraction from the sensible path of college. But Jason’s heart thumped a different rhythm, a beat he felt in his bones. Was music his future? Or was it the sterile halls of academia Mrs. T envisioned?

He pushed open the creaky door. Inside, the air was thick with the ghosts of rhymes and beats. Dim lights cast long shadows, making the graffiti-covered walls seem to writhe. A man with eyes that held ancient wisdom and a smile that hinted at secrets sat behind a small counter. He wore a faded, autographed hip-hop hat. This was Pops, the museum’s keeper, a legend whispered about in hushed tones by local artists.

“Welcome, young blood,” Pops rasped, his voice like gravel rolling downhill. “Five bucks to enter the land of sound.”

Jason handed over the bill. Pops' smile widened, revealing a glint of gold tooth. "And a soda pop for the journey?" he offered, gesturing to a cooler humming ominously in the corner. Jason nodded, choosing a bright red one. The fizziness tickled his throat as he stepped further into the museum.

The walls were a chaotic collage of history. Yellowed flyers advertised legendary battles. Faded photographs showed smiling faces of pioneers. A display case held a worn-out turntable, its needle forever poised. Jason traced the grooves on an old vinyl record, imagining the energy that once pulsed from it. He could almost hear the crowd roaring. He felt a strange pull, a sense of belonging he'd never experienced before. This was more than just music; it was a culture, a voice for the voiceless.

He moved deeper into the maze of exhibits. A section dedicated to horrorcore rap sent a shiver down his spine. The lyrics displayed were dark, unsettling, tales of fear and despair. He saw posters for groups whose names sounded like nightmares. A mannequin wore a tattered cloak, a menacing grin painted on its face. Jason felt a prickle of unease. This was a side of music his mother would definitely despise, a dark mirror to her bright, orderly world. Yet, there was a raw power in it, a cathartic release in confronting the shadows.

He stopped before a display of old microphones. One, in particular, stood out. It was scarred, dented, as if it had weathered a thousand storms. A small, handwritten tag read: "The Whisperer. Used by the unseen." A chill snaked up Jason's arm. He felt a strange urge to touch it, to connect with whatever energy it held. As his fingers neared the cold metal, a faint whisper seemed to echo in his mind, too soft to decipher, yet undeniably there. He pulled his hand back, his heart pounding.

He felt a sudden shift in the atmosphere, a drop in temperature that had nothing to do with the soda pop. The shadows seemed to deepen, elongating into distorted shapes. He glanced at Pops, who was watching him with an unreadable expression, his eyes glinting in the dim light.

Then, it happened. A guttural growl, seemingly from nowhere, ripped through the silence. The lights flickered violently, plunging the room into near darkness. Jason stumbled back, his soda pop sloshing. He heard a scraping sound, like claws on concrete, coming from the darkest corner of the room.

Panic seized him. He wanted to run, to bolt for the door, but his feet felt rooted to the spot. A shadowy figure began to materialize, tall and gaunt, its eyes glowing with an eerie, malevolent light. It was more shadow than substance, a manifestation of the darkness he'd seen on the posters. The whispers intensified, swirling around him like a chilling wind, now forming words, dark incantations filled with despair and rage.

"You…cannot…escape…" the whisper hissed, its voice a chilling symphony of fear.

Suddenly, Pops' voice boomed, cutting through the terror. "Stand firm, young blood! This place holds many stories, some darker than others. But the beat is stronger than the silence!"

He moved with surprising agility, grabbing an old, dusty boombox from a shelf. With a flick of his wrist, he pressed play. A fierce, driving hip-hop beat erupted, powerful and defiant. The shadowy figure recoiled, as if struck by an invisible force. The whispers faltered.

Jason, his own fear momentarily eclipsed by the surge of music, found

his voice. He started to rap, the words tumbling out, a raw expression of his own anxieties and newfound courage. He rapped about the choices he faced, the darkness he felt, and the light he craved. His voice, shaky at first, grew stronger with each line, fueled by the pounding beat and Pops' knowing glance.

As he rapped, the shadowy figure began to dissipate, fading back into the oppressive darkness from which it came. The whispers quieted, replaced by the triumphant rhythm of the music. The lights stabilized, casting a warm glow once more.

Jason's chest heaved. He looked at Pops, who was nodding slowly, a proud smile on his face. "You found your voice," he said, his eyes twinkling. "It's louder than any shadow." He then reached into his pocket and pulled out the autographed hat he was wearing. "A gift. For the one who faced the darkness and sang through it."

He placed the hat on Jason's head. It felt surprisingly light, yet heavy with history. Jason thanked Pops, his voice still a little hoarse. He walked out of the museum, the red soda pop forgotten.

As he turned up the street, the bright sun felt warm on his face. Then, he saw them. A family huddled in a doorway, a mother and two small children, their faces etched with hunger and weariness. They held a tattered cardboard sign that read: "Anything helps. God Bless."

The contrast struck Jason like a physical blow. He thought of the whispers, the shadows, the fear that had gripped him in the museum. But he also remembered the music, the beat, the power of his own voice. He thought of Mrs. T's worries, her desire for a stable future.

He looked at the family, their silent plea a different kind of music, a mournful song of struggle. He realized then. His path wasn't about escaping reality, but about confronting it, about using his voice to tell stories, to shed light on the darkness, and to offer a beat of hope to those who needed it most. College could wait. Music, this raw, powerful, sometimes terrifying music, was his calling. He had to find a way to use it to make a difference, to be a voice for those whose whispers were unheard. The hat felt heavy, a promise on his head. He walked towards the family, his decision made.

The b-ball game

Jason and Rockell walked into the loud gym. The smell of sweat and popcorn filled the air. It was Carlos's big basketball tournament. Carlos was Jason's younger brother. Jason squeezed Rockell's hand.

"Are you excited?" he asked.

Rockell smiled. "Of course! I want to see Carlos win."

They found seats near the court. The crowd cheered as the players ran out. Carlos was one of them. He looked small next to some of the other players, but he played with a lot of energy. Jason felt a pang of worry. Carlos was good, but this tournament was called "Paid Battle." That meant the

competition was tough.

The first game started. Carlos's team was playing hard. He was fast and smart. He made a few amazing shots. Jason watched, a mix of pride and fear in his stomach. He kept an eye on Rockell. She was laughing with a friend, her attention on the game.

Then, Jason saw someone he didn't expect. Sitting a few rows down was Terrell, his other brother. Terrell was older and usually kept to himself. He was watching the game intently. But that wasn't the strangest part. Next to Terrell, a young woman was sitting. She had a two-year-old boy on her lap, who was playing with her hair. Jason knew her. It was Lisa. She was Terrell's girlfriend. And Jason had a bad feeling about her being here. He remembered Rockell mentioning something about Lisa being a little���odd. Something about her being too close to her family, almost unnaturally so.

"Hey, Rockell," Jason whispered, nudging her. "Look who's here."

Rockell followed his gaze. Her eyes widened slightly. "Oh, wow. Terrell and Lisa. I didn't think they'd come." She paused. "Is

everything okay?”

“I don’t know,” Jason admitted. “Lisa’s here with her little brother, I think. She’s holding him really tight, almost like… like he’s a part of her.” He shivered, though the gym was warm.

The games continued. Carlos’s team won their first match. Then their second. He was playing incredibly well. Jason felt a little bit of his worry ease, but the sight of Lisa kept him on edge. She hadn’t looked at them. She was focused on Terrell, her hand resting on his arm, her thumb tracing slow circles. The little boy on her lap babbled softly.

The highlight of the tournament was the dunk contest. Carlos was up against a tall, light-skinned guy named Float. Float was amazing. He jumped so high, it looked like he could touch the ceiling. The crowd roared with every dunk. Then it was Carlos’s turn. He took a deep breath. He ran, jumped, and slammed the ball through the hoop with a powerful dunk. The gym erupted. He had done it. He won the dunk contest.

After the tournament, Jason saw Terrell and Lisa getting up to leave. He decided to go over, despite his unease. Rockell followed him, her hand finding his again.

“Hey, Terrell,” Jason said, trying to sound casual.

Terrell nodded. “Jason. Rockell.” He looked a little tired.

Lisa turned. Her eyes met Jason’s, and he felt a cold dread creep up his spine. Her smile was a little too wide, her eyes too bright. The little boy on her lap stirred.

“Jason,” Lisa said, her voice a little breathy. “And Rockell. It’s nice to see you.” She adjusted the boy, who was now staring at Jason with wide, unblinking eyes. “This is my nephew, Timmy.”

“He’s cute,” Rockell said, her voice a little strained.

“He’s special,” Lisa corrected, her gaze flicking back to Jason. “Very special.”

Terrell cleared his throat. “Lisa’s uncle is here. Darnell. He’s a producer for rap music. He wanted to meet you guys.”

Jason blinked. “Darnell? The producer?” He’d heard of him. Darnell was making big waves in the music industry.

“Yes,” Lisa said, her smile never wavering. “He’s very interested in talent. He thinks he might see some here tonight.” Her eyes lingered on Jason, then on Carlos, who was now jogging over, beaming with pride.

Carlos joined them. “That was insane! I can’t believe I won the dunk contest!”

“You were amazing, little bro,” Jason said, forcing a smile. He still felt that prickle of unease. Lisa’s gaze was fixed on Carlos now, a strange intensity in her eyes. The little boy, Timmy, started to whimper, his small hands clutching at Lisa’s shirt.

“He doesn’t like loud noises,” Lisa murmured, stroking Timmy’s back. “But he loves music.” She looked at Jason again. “Uncle Darnell is a very influential man. He can make careers. He knows what’s... valuable.”

Jason felt a chill run down his spine. The way she said “valuable” sent a shiver through him. It wasn’t just about music. It felt like a warning. Or a threat. The gym, which had been filled with the joyous sounds of basketball and cheering, now seemed to hold a new, unsettling silence, punctuated only by Timmy’s soft whimpers and the unnerving stillness in

Lisa’s eyes. He felt a growing certainty that meeting Uncle Darnell might be far more dangerous than winning any basketball tournament.

THE CALL FROM D

Jason was sitting in his dimly lit room, the glow of his screen lighting up his focused face. He had spent the evening immersed in a wild adventure on his favorite video game. In the game, he was a fearless knight battling fierce dragons to save a kingdom. The noises of swords clashing and the thundering roars of the dragons made him feel alive.

Suddenly, after an intense boss battle, his phone buzzed loudly on the cluttered desk. He paused the game and picked it up. It was Darnell, the new producer he had met through Lisa Terrell, the girlfriend of his friend, Homey. Jason's heart raced; this could be the opportunity he'd been waiting for.

"Hey, Jason! It's Darnell," the voice on the other side was cheerful and excited. "I hope you’re ready for some big

news."

Jason took a deep breath, trying to keep calm. "Yeah, I'm here. What's up?"

"I want to offer you something special. How about a brand new Rolex? It’s worth two grand!" Darnell exclaimed. Jason couldn’t believe his ears. A fancy watch was not just a gift; it felt like a ticket to a new life.

His mind raced as he thought about the possibilities. “And that’s not all! I’m assigning you your first rehearsal date with Homey Terrell this Saturday. Don’t disappoint me, alright?”

“Wow, thank you!” Jason said, trying hard to contain his excitement. "I won’t let you down!"

As the call ended, Jason jumped up, nearly knocking over a stack of empty pizza boxes. Was this real? A Rolex and a rehearsal? His heart thudded like a drum. He felt like he was standing on the edge of something great, but also something strange.

He rushed downstairs to tell his mom, Mrs. T. She was sitting in the living room, watching her favorite detective show. "Mom! You won’t believe what just happened!"

She turned to him, her face lighting up with curiosity. "What, honey?"

"Darnell just called. He’s giving me a Rolex and setting up a rehearsal with Homey! Can you believe it?”

Mrs. T smiled but looked worried for a moment. "That sounds amazing, Jason. Just remember to be careful with new people. Not everyone is who they seem."

Jason nodded, but his excitement drowned out her concern. The doorbell rang. It was Carlos, his friend with the striking green eyes and carefree smile. “Hey, man! I heard the great news. I’m here to take you for a ride!”

“Thanks, Carlos! I need to go to Rockelle with you on Saturday, and I’ll pay you fifty bucks for the lift,” Jason said, grabbing his jacket.

“No problem! Just keep your phone charged, alright? You never know what could happen.” Carlos replied, pulling him out of the house.

As they drove through the quiet streets, Jason felt a mix of excitement and anxiety. The town was eerily quiet, the streetlights flickering intermittently, casting long shadows along the road. He glanced at Carlos, who seemed unusually serious.

“What’s up?” Jason asked.

“Nothing really. Just thinking about the rehearsal. Is everything okay with that Darnell guy?” Carlos asked, eyes on the road.

“Yeah, why?” Jason replied, a little defensively.

Carlos shrugged, looking uncertain. “Just heard some stories about fast money and swift promises. Just be careful.”

Jason dismissed his friend's worries. He was too high on the thrill of the moment to consider them. They parked at Rockelle, the local hangout where Lisa would be, ready to celebrate their upcoming journey.

As they stepped in, Jason felt the buzz of energy around the place. Friends were laughing, music was playing, and everything felt alive. Lisa spotted them and rushed over with her bright smile. "There you are, stars of the night!"

Suddenly, the lights flickered, and a low rumble reverberated through the floor, causing a moment of stillness where laughter faded into silence. Jason's heart raced again, but it wasn't from excitement anymore. He noticed that people looked around confused, as if waiting for something to happen.

Then, out of nowhere, a thunderous crash echoed from the back of the club, followed by shouts of panic. The lights went out completely, plunging them into darkness.

"Get down!" Carlos shouted, pulling Jason close.

In the pitch black, Jason could hear whispers and footsteps moving fast. His excitement drained away, replaced by a creeping fear. Was this just a prank, or was something truly wrong?

Suddenly, a flashlight flickered on, illuminating a shadowy figure at the corner. It was Darnell, standing there with a strange smile. “Jason! I’m glad you could make it. I told you not to disappoint me.”

Jason’s heart sank as a chill ran through him. The excitement of the watch and the rehearsal faded as fear crept in. “Darnell? What’s going on?”

“Nothing to worry about. Just a few surprises,” Darnell replied, stepping forward into the light, but he looked different, almost sinister.

Jason backed away, pulling Carlos with him. They needed to get out, but the door was blocked by the crowd flowing towards Darnell.

“Let’s go!” Carlos urged, grabbing Jason’s arm.

They pushed through the chaos, desperate to find a way out as more mysterious shadows moved within the crowd. Just as they made it outside, Jason glanced back at Darnell, a twisted grin revealing something dark and unexpected.

In that moment, he realized that the world of excitement he had entered might not be what it seemed. He and Carlos raced away into the night, leaving the horrors behind, but the thought of what lay ahead lingered in Jason’s mind.